

Soldiers Gain No-Cost College Credit for NCOES

By SGM John Weiske

Recently, an American Council on Education (ACE) evaluation team reviewed the Program of Instruction (POI) of all USASMA-generated NCOES courses. Each POI was analyzed for its content and depth of material as compared to college level studies and classified into major areas of concentration. The team then determined the college course equivalency and the amount of credit hours earned for the instruction.

The BNCOC and ANCOC recommended credits are from the evaluation of the Common Leader Training portion of the course, which is USASMA's responsibility. Each proponent school is responsible for the additional MOS instruction and ensuring that the entire course is evaluated by ACE.

It's important to note that the Battle Staff NCO Course wasn't previously evaluated by ACE and graduates of the course haven't been able to receive corresponding college credit for the course. Battle Staff NCO Course graduates should now consider applying for an update on their Servicemembers Opportunity College Agreement (SOCAD) to have the recommended credit from BSNCOOC applied to their college transcript.

This ACE evaluation included the Sergeants Major Course nine-month POI, which will allow the present class to receive college credit upon graduation in June of 1996. Since the POI was extended from 22 weeks to 40 weeks, the course increased from 18 to 22 recommended credit hours, 11 hours of which are considered upper level (junior/senior) instruction.

All ACE-recommended credit for NCOES and other Army training courses is listed in the Guide to the Evaluation of Education Experience in the Armed Services publication. This guide is located in ev-

ery Army Education Center and provides the education counselor a means of evaluating the soldier's military training toward college equivalency credit.

Each college reserves the right to accept or reject the ACE recommendations for credit as there is no guarantee that the college will accept the credit as listed in the ACE guide. All Servicemember Opportunity Colleges will evaluate military training using the ACE Guide and will apply the recommended credit toward a degree plan. In most cases they will not transcript duplicated credit.

The soldier must complete a DD Form 295, Application for the Evaluation of Learning Experience During Military Service, at his or her servicing personnel office and provide a certified copy to the education counselor. The counselor will ensure that all information is correct and add the corresponding ACE evaluation numbers. The DD 295 is then sent to the college for evaluation. Any time a soldier is evaluated at a different college a DD Form 295 must be submitted for evaluation by that college. These hours will not transfer from one college to another as a transcript course does.

The ACE-recommended college equivalency hours are at no cost to the soldier or the government and are based strictly on the evaluation of the course POI. As a school's POI is changed or substantially amended it should be re-evaluated by ACE to ensure soldiers are receiving the maximum amount of credit as they complete their MOS or NCOES development training. ■

Weiske is school secretariat for the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, Ft. Bliss, TX.



At Ft. Benning...

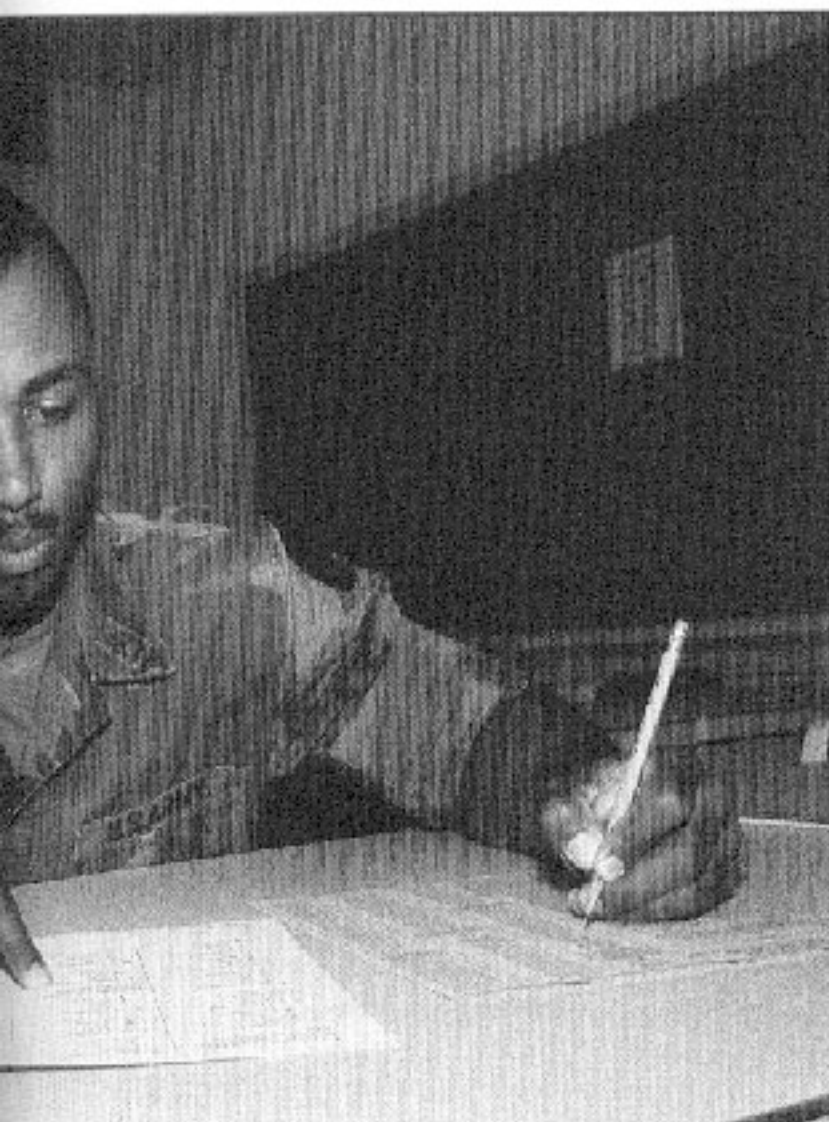
BASE H

By SSG David Abrams

For years, soldiers on their way to NCOES courses have filed into a small room, sat at desks and filled in the bubbles on test score sheets with No. 2 pencils. The examination, the Test of Adult Basic Education, is designed to give Army school officials an idea of the soldier's general knowledge of math, reading and grammar skills. Taking the TABE has become as familiar as packing the duffle bag for PLDC.

Now there's another test on the horizon—one which may eventually replace the TABE with questions specifically designed to evaluate common military leadership skills.

The Basic Army Skills Examination goes even farther than the TABE in measuring a soldier's knowledge of skills related to the military, said Bill Kinnison, an education services specialist with



SSG Marcus Johnson ponders a question while taking the TABE at the Ft. Bliss, TX, Army Education Center.

Photo by SSG David Abrams

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Training and Doctrine Command's Education Training and Support Division.

"Some areas on both tests are identical—such as, reading comprehension and identifying parts of speech," he said. "But what the BASE has that the TABE doesn't is questions on how to read tables, graphs and gauges. These are skills every soldier needs to know."

Kinnison, the unofficial cheerleader for the BASE, is proposing that the Army phase out the TABE and replace it with the BASE. It's a move he admits is not popular in many circles. When he briefed on the BASE at the recent Worldwide NCOES Conference, Kinnison was met with protests from senior leaders concerned about the effectiveness of the new test and the costs associated with fielding it to local education centers.

"We've already done all the prelimi-

nary research on BASE," he said, referring to a \$15 million, intensive front-end task analysis of BASE conducted before the first proposal went up to the Department of the Army for approval. "We looked at 94 high-density Military Occupational Specialties to determine the academic skills they needed for each level of NCOES. It was the most detailed research study ever done on this planet!"

"The only studies done on the TABE as it relates to NCOES involve test results," he continued. "Those studies don't go into the test contents as specifically related to NCOES."

Kinnison and other proponents of the BASE are currently waiting on the go-ahead from the office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations. Once the green light is official, Kinnison said the BASE could be in the hands of local education centers within nine months.

The biggest beauty of the BASE is the fact that the Army "owns" it, Kinnison noted. First developed in 1987 for U.S. Army Europe, the BASE has since seen a lot of shelf life as education centers continue to use the traditional TABE for soldiers bound for NCOES.

"One thing that makes the BASE so special is the fact that soldier tasks are matched to academic tasks and then tested on the BASE so everything is linked," Kinnison added. "The TABE on the other hand is a general basic skills test that was developed for civilian use."

One significant change in the works is setting a passing score for each level of NCOES. "We know the level of knowledge needs to go up as the soldier's level of responsibility increases," Kinnison said. "Therefore, the different cut-off scores would more accurately measure what that soldier needs to know at each level of his or her career. I'm sure this is

something that would have a lot of appeal for NCOs taking the test."

In addition, Kinnison proposes that each career management field establish its own score. "For instance, the more technical CMFs may want to set a much higher passing score than the rest of the Army," he said. "Others may not feel they need to set such high scores."

Kinnison's suggestion is that subject matter experts like chiefs of schools and local academy cadre be the ones to set the score standards. "What could be more appropriate than NCOs coming up with the passing scores?" he says. "NCOs will have their hands on the BASE from the start. After all, it's their test; they own it. My goal is to get this exam off the dusty shelves and into the hands of NCOs."

At least one education center in the Army has blown the dust off the booklet covers and started using the BASE on a regular basis.

At Fort Benning, GA, the BASE has completely replaced the TABE in the last two years, primarily due to substantial savings, said Elaine Livingston, education services officer for the installation. "Every time we gave the TABE, we had to pay for all the materials," she said. "With the BASE, however, there are no costs involved."

Test Control Officer Gloria Kelsey, who works directly with the new exam, said not only is the BASE easier to administer (it requires fewer individual timed sections), it's also more pertinent to those filling in the answer sheets. "Most of the questions are directly related to the Army—for instance, the reading comprehension scenarios are about soldiers and military life," she said. "This makes it very familiar territory for the test-takers."

Both Ft. Benning officials said they see a bright future for the BASE, at least at their installation.

Meanwhile, as Kinnison continues to wait for approval from DCSOPS, he also continues to champion the proposal to change the exams: "The research and statistical analysis has all been done and it tells us that the BASE is a good, reliable test." ■

Abrams is senior journalist for The NCO Journal.